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SUBJECT: REVISED HIV PREVALENCE RATES FOR MALAWI

¶1. Summary: A new survey conducted with UNAIDS' revised methodology shows 2007 HIV prevalence rates in Malawi for adults ages 15-49 at 12%. The GOM will likely release the survey soon. As part of the new study, the HIV prevalence rate reported in 2005 has been revised from 14% to 12% for adults ages 15-49 as a result of the new UNAIDS methodology. While prevalence rates declined between 1998, when the overall HIV prevalence was estimated at 13.9%, and 2005, they have remained stable since 2005. Malawi continues to register an increase in overall numbers of infected adults due to the growing population, and increased lifespan of infected persons now able to access antiretroviral therapy. The survey suggests that new infections in urban areas have continued declining, but new efforts will be needed to prevent transmission in rural areas. End Summary

¶2. The 2005 "HIV and Syphilis Sero-Survey and National HIV Prevalence Estimates Report" had previously estimated HIV/AIDS prevalence in adults (15 - 49 years) in Malawi at 14.02%, with a range from 12 to 17%. A total of 790,000 adults were reported infected; 96,552 new infections were estimated to occur each year. These data were modeled using sentinel surveys which focused on a small sample of pregnant women in a defined set of antenatal clinics.

#### NEW UNAIDS METHODOLOGY YIELDS NEW BASELINE

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¶3. In 2007 however, UNAIDS reported that prevalence estimates from ANC sentinel survey data were too high because they focused on a high risk group of the population, i.e. pregnant women who tended to have higher infection rates. UNAIDS suggested that countries adjust ANC sentinel survey data to levels projected by DHS data, which randomly select individuals from the entire population and consequently are more accurate. Ultimately UNAIDS recommended a new methodology to estimate HIV prevalence rates using both newly available Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data and the Antenatal Clinic (ANC) Sentinel Survey data. Malawi integrated this recommendation into its 2007 HIV prevalence estimation.

¶4. In November 2007, Malawi convened a panel of experts to recalibrate HIV prevalence estimates using the newly available 2007 ANC sentinel data and 2005 DHS data. The "HIV and Syphilis Sero-Survey and National HIV Prevalence Estimates Report for 2007," due to be released shortly, will show prevalence rates for adults 15-49 years of age at 12%, with a range from 11.1% to 12.9%, giving a total of 809,833 infected adults (15+), 89,055 infected children (0 - 14 years) and ~85,000 new infections each year, including both adults and children. Furthermore, the GOM has revised its 2005 HIV/AIDS prevalence in 2005 in adults (15 - 49 years) to 12% from 14.02%, giving a total of 792,754 infected adults (15+) and 74,105 infected children (0 - 14 years).

LIMITED USG PARTICIPATION IN SURVEY

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15. Due to ethical concerns, OGAC adopted CDC-issued guidance that prevents USG participation in non-consensual HIV testing. Sentinel surveys at ANC clinics do not ask for consent in testing anonymous specimens, and thus cannot alert a patient of their HIV status. As a result, USG did not take part in the survey's specimen collection phase or actual lab analysis, but did assist in the evaluation of data. Technical support was provided to Malawi both from the PEPFAR Country Team and from colleagues at CDC headquarters in Atlanta to develop the critical national and regional figures for HIV program planning and advocacy, capacity development, and for preparing HIV estimates for national and international reporting needs.

PROGRESS GOOD IN URBAN AREAS, SLOW IN COUNTRYSIDE  
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16. These new numbers show that though prevalence rates and trends steadily had declined from around 14% to 12% between 1998 and 2005, there has not been a significant decline in overall HIV prevalence rates in Malawi between 2005 and 2007. (The original figure for prevalence in 1998 was 22.2%, but the recent study recalibrated this figure down to 13.9%.) Malawi continues to register an increase in numbers of infected adults, attributable to the ever-growing population (2007 population estimated at 13.6 million people), and the increased lifespan of people living with HIV due to expanding availability of antiretroviral therapy. There are some encouraging trends in the new numbers, however. For example, estimated HIV prevalence in urban areas (where approximately one fifth of Malawi's population lives) has continued to decline from an estimated 22.2% in 1998 to 17.4% in 2005, and to 15.6% in 2007.

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